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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF  
**COMMERCE**

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***Fisheries Service to Conduct "Status Review"  
of Seven Species of Puget Sound Fish***

The National Marine Fisheries Service said today it will conduct a year-long biological "status review" of seven species of fish in Puget Sound as a first step to determine if they need protection under the Endangered Species Act.

The seven species are part of a more expansive petition sent to the agency last February to examine 18 Puget Sound species, the largest number the federal agency has ever been asked to consider under the federal species-protection law. The seven are Puget Sound populations of Pacific herring, Pacific cod, Pacific hake, walleye pollock and brown, copper and quillback rockfish. It is also the first time the agency has been asked to conduct such a review of a West Coast fish species other than salmon.

Although until the early 1980s there was a commercial Puget Sound hake fishery, and until recently there was a limited fishery for herring and their eggs by both tribal and non-tribal commercial fishermen in Puget Sound, the remaining species are typically targeted by sport fishermen.

The agency said there was insufficient information on the remaining 11 species -- all varieties of bottom-dwelling rockfish -- to warrant a status review of them.

The status review, scheduled for completion next February, will make a science-based recommendation on whether or not an Endangered Species Act listing may be warranted. If at that time the agency makes a formal proposal to list any of the seven species, it would have another year to make a final decision to commit to a formal listing.

The agency said it would be working closely with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the treaty Indian tribes in western Washington as it progressed with its status review.

The petition was submitted by Sam Wright, a former biologist with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, who lives in Olympia, Wash.

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